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VERSES *

BY RUTH BREWSTER SHERMAN

So long the ships within the harbor ride,
Tugging their chains and yearning to be free,
Leaping like sentient things to meet the tide,
Tired of the wharf, and eager for the sea!
And when, with loosened bonds, the anchors slip,
Free of the harbor, to a land unknown
Fare barge and schooner, sloop and merchant ship,
Trusting the compass and the stars alone
To guide them through the pathless, trackless sea
Safe to the haven where they fain would be.

Far sundered are their ports,—their paths apart,
Each ship its cargo,—each its guiding chart;
But one the star that leads them o'er the foam,
And one the beacon bright that brings them home.
And if, returning, night and storm impede,
On come the ships, nor feel a thought of fear:
With faith and courage equal to their need
They know their harbor lights are shining clear.

So fare we forth from out our harbor here,
Where skilful builders, lab'ring wise and long,
Have laid the timbers, shaped us year by year,
Welded the plating, set the rivets strong,
Taught us the signals, pointed out the star:
'Tis ours to choose the port, to find the way,
To bear their flag, unstained, to countries far,
To serve our masters as a good ship may.

Guided are we by compass and by chart,
By radiant stars above, by lights on shore,
Fitted our cargo to the foreign mart,
Our pilot-boats the lives of those before:
Serve we the world as they have served of yore!
The Vigilando Cross our ensign be—
The Lord of Life is with us evermore,
Our harbor-lights are shining on the sea.

* Written for the Graduating Class of 1901, Johns Hopkins Hospital, and read at the class dinner.